

Healthy Bastards

WARNING:

What follows may contain discussions of "men's problems" that are blunt, non-PC, often cringe-worthy, and at times will use language your grandmother would find offensive. You could expect to find a disclaimer such as this in the foreword to Dr Dave Baldwin's book, *Healthy Bastards: A Bloke's Guide to Being Healthy*. In true Baldwin style though, there's no disclaimer to be found – Dr Dave is completely unapologetic about his bold approach to talking to men about their health.

Dave Baldwin is an experienced GP, a pilot as part of the Bulls Flying Doctor service, and author of an "accessible guide to health for the everyday Kiwi bloke." This incredible combination could be linked to Dave's upbringing; the product of a dad who was a Royal Flying Corps fighter pilot in World War I and a younger mother who was a "true naturopath." Dave is a father of three, an aviator, a husband and a doctor with a limitless passion for life and a mission to reach more than just the "worried well" with his message.

Dave says the reason for writing *Healthy Bastards* is simple: "I am hoping that if this book can catch on among the unhealthy bastards in our society with its non PC humour and Barry Crump-style of writing, then they may well take on some of the health messages intertwined within its humour." It's about reaching blokes who won't listen to health advice and subsequently die from "self-induced" illnesses like heart attacks, strokes and cancer. Sound harsh? Well, Dave's not one to pull any punches – he says that the Kiwi "she'll be right" culture makes being an "unhealthy bastard" almost cool and therefore, blokes lack basic knowledge on how to stay healthy with a good diet and lifestyle and avoid GPs like the plague... sound familiar? Well, you may just find that getting regular health checks and being generally aware of your health isn't as awkward or mysterious as you thought.

At this point, allow me to introduce you to the blokish (and fictional) Gav McAvedy. Gav (alias – you, the reader) features regularly in Dave's book and is used to "expose" in all their glory, the range of health problems men may face.

Take for example, "Gav's prostate gland, pecker failure and infections of the privates." You're probably thinking, "Do I really want to read on?" – but Gav's baring all so that you don't have to. So suck it up, and let's see exactly what that means.

Dave is referring to prostate gland problems – from prostatitis, prostate cancer, sexual failure (pecker failure to the less brainy bastards) and sexually transmitted diseases. Behind all the humour are some serious issues for guys to be aware of. This is one very important and often embarrassing area for men to get checked out but it is important that they do because not all conditions have obvious symptoms. With prostate cancer, guidelines now say men should get checked regularly from the age of 40 and Dr Dave warns that if you do have a prostate problem, the chances of getting it treated successfully are much greater if things are sorted out early. Around 600 men die of prostate cancer a year and it is estimated that at least half of these deaths could have been prevented by early detection.

Another key health issue for New Zealand men is high blood pressure, which Dr Dave bluntly informs us "will bugar your heart, bugar your brain... and lots of other things." The big message here is that high blood pressure is bad for your body and long-term high blood pressure greatly increases the risk of developing strokes. What is the solution? Well, Dave encourages men to get off their chuffs and get their local GP to measure it. But other key prevention strategies include managing your weight and diet, reducing alcohol intake, quitting smoking and increasing physical activity. The Stroke Foundation of New Zealand says that one third of strokes are attributable to high blood pressure and each day, seven New Zealanders die from stroke.

A good way for men to look at their health is to recognise that the body is in many ways similar to a well-designed machine. Like a car or boat, the body needs maintenance check-ups and oil changes if it is going to last the distance – hence the visit your local GP every year or so to check things like blood pressure, prostate health and cholesterol.

Likewise, eating a good diet and less junk food in order to care for your body is no different to you providing the best fuel and oil to a vehicle that you really value and treasure. This is the key message of not only Dr Dave's *Healthy Bastards* book but also of the Men's Health Week 2010 campaign that Dave is supporting – launching in New Zealand for the first time this year.

Men's Health Week 2010 runs from the 14th to the 20th of June and is part of an international preventative health campaign designed to encourage men to be proactive about their physical and mental health. Men's Health Week 2010 is supported by the Mana Tane Ora O Aotearoa (National Maori Men's Health Coalition), Registered Master Builders and Carters, and is run on behalf of the Australasian Men's Health Forum, General Practice New Zealand, the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand and the Prostate Cancer Foundation.

Bull Allen, one of the ambassadors for Men's Health Week 2010 is very passionate about men's health. He has a history of prostate cancer in his family, making him keenly aware of the need for regular health checks at the GP: "I hope that one of the outcomes of the Men's Health Week campaign – what I'd like to see – is that guys don't wait until they're in their 50s and 60s to start thinking about their health. Prevention is better than cure." Brendan Pongia, another ambassador for the campaign, is also passionate about doing his part for men's health and in particular, getting the word out to Maori and Pacific Island men – who are less likely to visit a GP and therefore, are at higher risk of dying from preventable health issues.

